

## What's New?

Updated March 2015

With support from the ~~State of Montana and the~~ City of Columbia Falls and the ~~State of Montana~~, EPA has proposed to add the Anaconda Aluminum Company's Columbia Falls Aluminum Reduction Plant (also known as Columbia Falls Aluminum Company Plant) near Columbia Falls, Montana to the National Priorities List (NPL). Adding the site to the NPL would make it eligible for comprehensive investigation and cleanup resources under EPA's Superfund program.

**Commented [CM1]:** Why mention the Cit as the site is not actually located within city limits?

**Commented [CM2]:** This is inconsistent with the plant write-up – page 1, first paragraph

[View the news release »](#)

The Superfund law provides the public an opportunity to participate throughout the Superfund process. EPA will be accepting public comments on the proposed Superfund listing for 60 days, beginning on March 26, after publication in the Federal Register.

Records used in making this proposed Superfund listing will be available at the following locations:

### **ImagineIF Library – Columbia Falls**

130 6th Street West  
Columbia Falls, MT 59912  
406-892-5919

Hours:

Monday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Tuesday–Wednesday 10 a.m.–7 p.m.

Thursday 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Friday 12 p.m.–6 p.m.

Saturday 12 p.m.–4 p.m.

Sunday closed

### **EPA Region 8 Headquarters**

Superfund Records Center  
1595 Wynkoop Street  
Denver, CO 80202-1129

To request copies of documents call:  
303-312-7273 or  
800-227-8917 ext. 312-7273 (toll free Region 8 only)

Comments are due no later than 60 days from the date of publication in the Federal Register. Comments may be submitted by using one of the following four methods:

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1. Go to [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) and follow the online instructions for submitting comments using FDMS Docket # EPA-HQ-SFUND-2015-0139.
2. For written comments, please send the original and three copies to the following address:  
Docket Coordinator, Headquarters  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
CERCLA Docket Office (Mail Code – 5305T)  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20460
3. For hand delivery or express mail, please send the original and three copies to the following address:  
Docket Coordinator, Headquarters  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
CERCLA Docket Office  
1301 Constitution Avenue, NW  
EPA West, Room 3334  
Washington, DC 20004  
(8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Mon. – Fri.)
4. By email at [superfund.docket@epa.gov](mailto:superfund.docket@epa.gov)

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## Site Description

The aluminum reduction plant began production in 1955, operated by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. Aluminum was produced at the facility using the Hall Heroult process. The plant ceased production in 2009.

Multiple potential sources, including landfills and percolation ponds, are located at the facility. A byproduct of the aluminum reduction process is spent potliner material, which is known to contain cyanide and fluoride compounds that can leach into groundwater. Spent potliner material was disposed on site from approximately 1955 to approximately 1985. Other landfills and ponds have been used to dispose of various waste streams throughout the lifespan of the plant.

## Potential Site Risks

Media Affected	Contaminants	Source of Contamination
<b>Percolation ponds (water and sediment)</b>	cyanide; fluoride; semi-volatile organic compounds; metals, including aluminum, arsenic, chromium, copper, iron, lead, magnesium, manganese, nickel, sodium, vanadium, zinc; pesticides; Arochlor-1254	aerial deposition; ponds received process fluids that have since (partially) evaporated or percolated
<b>Groundwater down-gradient of landfill area</b>	cyanide; fluoride; metals, including aluminum, arsenic, chromium, copper, iron lead, nickel, selenium, vanadium	leaching from landfills and sludge pond complex, percolation ponds, and potentially other unknown sources
<b>Cedar Creek and Flathead River</b>	cyanide; fluoride; metals, including copper, manganese, potassium, sodium, zinc	groundwater infiltration; groundwater seeps

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## Investigation Results

A Site Reassessment was completed for the Columbia Falls Aluminum Reduction Plant site in April 2014. EPA collected environmental samples in September and

October 2013 as part of the Site Reassessment. Results from that report are summarized here. The full report for this investigation is available in [Site Documents](#) below. The assessment and report is organized such that sources are evaluated to determine associated contaminants and then compared to analytical results for potential receptors, including surface water and groundwater down gradient of the source areas.

### **Landfill Sources**

Samples were not directly collected from landfills at the site to avoid compromising the integrity of the covers. In lieu of direct sampling, EPA sampled monitoring wells previously installed in locations down-gradient and up-gradient of the landfill and sludge pond sources to determine if contaminants have been released to groundwater.

Multiple contaminants were detected in groundwater above background concentrations, including cyanide, fluoride, and metals, such as aluminum, arsenic, chromium, copper, iron, lead, nickel, selenium and vanadium, among others.

### **Percolation Pond Sources**

Waste sediment and surface water samples were collected from two percolation ponds for a common hazardous constituent analysis to determine contaminants present in the ponds at the site. Multiple contaminants were detected in the water and sediment samples, including: cyanide and fluoride; semi-volatile organic compounds, such as anthracene, benzo(a)pyrene, chrysene, fluoranthene, and pyrene, among others; metals, including aluminum, arsenic, chromium, copper, iron, lead, magnesium, manganese, nickel, sodium, vanadium and zinc, among others; and pesticides.

### **Groundwater Migration Pathway**

As discussed previously, landfill sources were indirectly evaluated by comparing down-gradient groundwater samples to up-gradient, background groundwater samples. This evaluation confirms that contaminants discussed previously have been released to groundwater at the site. Groundwater samples collected from monitoring wells at the facility contained multiple contaminants, including

cyanide, fluoride, arsenic, chromium, lead, and selenium, with concentrations above federal drinking water standards. Although the groundwater at the facility is not used for drinking purposes, the groundwater has the potential to migrate off-site.

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Three rounds of domestic well sampling have occurred. As part of the Site Reassessment sampling event conducted in September and October, 2013, five residential wells were evaluated to determine if groundwater near the facility has been impacted. Cyanide was detected in one well southwest of the facility and one well to the north of the facility. The detections of cyanide were below EPA's Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL) for drinking water and the State of Montana's Numeric Water Quality Standards. When compared to EPA's Risk-Based Screening Levels, however, the concentrations of cyanide in both water samples were higher than the EPA Tapwater Risk-Based Screening Level. The screening concentration is a conservative value that EPA considers to be protective for humans over a lifetime. Exceeding these values does not necessarily indicate that a health affect will occur, but that a more detailed assessment may be warranted. No other contaminants were detected above the regulatory benchmarks or risk-based screening levels in residential wells during the first round of sampling. As part of subsequent sampling events, in April 2014 and November 2014, 20 residential wells and 10 residential wells, respectively, were sampled. For all residential wells in both subsequent sampling events, there were no contaminants detected above the regulatory benchmarks or risk-based screening levels, including cyanide.

### **Surface Water Migration Pathway**

Surface water and sediments from the Flathead River and Cedar Creek were collected for a common hazardous constituent analysis. Similar to the groundwater analysis, downstream samples were compared to background samples to determine if there is an observed release of any contaminants. In Cedar Creek, there were observed releases of copper, cyanide and potassium. In Flathead River, there were observed releases of cyanide, manganese, sodium, zinc and fluoride.

This stretch of the Flathead River is used by anglers. Fish tissue samples were not collected as part of the site reassessment. With the limited amount of data

captured as part of this sampling event, it is unknown if bioaccumulation of these contaminants is a concern.

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## Next Steps

After proposal to the National Priorities List, there will be a 60-day public comment period. At the close of the comment period, EPA will review and respond to publically pertinent comments. A final decision regarding adding the Site to the NPL National Priorities List will be documented in a subsequent Federal Register notice. The earliest the Anaconda Aluminum Company Columbia Falls Reduction Plant Site could be finalized on the National Priorities List would be in the fall of 2015.

**Commented [CM5]:** Use acronym here (previously used above)? I can see the wisdom of spelling out the word again b/c given that the last mention was several pages again but no need to write out in full both times in this paragraph.

**Commented [PC6]:** Do we only respond to pertinent comments? How is that determined?

**Commented [CM7]:** This needs to be updated

The Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) is the next phase of the Superfund process. The objectives of the RI/FS are to determine the nature and extent of contamination at the site, test whether certain technologies are capable of treating the contamination, and evaluate the cost and performance of technologies that could be used to clean up the site. Community involvement during the RI/FS is highly encouraged. For information on how to get involved, visit [www.epa.gov/superfund/community](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/community).

On November 30, 2015, EPA entered into a binding legal agreement known as an administrative order on consent (AOC) with Columbia Falls Aluminum Company, a potentially responsible party, to perform the RI/FS. Under this agreement, EPA will oversee the company-conducted RI/FS, in consultation with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Columbia Falls Aluminum Company through its parent company, Glencore Ltd., arranged for financial assurance to compensate EPA for the cost of completing the RI/FS should the company become unable or unwilling to finish the RI/FS. EPA will subsequently negotiate a separate legal agreement with the potentially responsible parties to implement the cleanup after the RI/FS is completed and EPA selects the cleanup remedy.

## Site Documents

Federal Register Notice of National Priorities List, Proposed Rule No. XX

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Letters supporting NPL proposal from Montana Governor Bullock and Columbia Falls Mayor Barnhart

Columbia Falls Site Reassessment Report, April 4, 2014

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## Links

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